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Scaliger and his collection of Arabic books

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SCALIGER AND HIS COLLECTION OF ARABIC BOOKS

BY KASPER VAN OMMEN

The humanist Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609) is widely considered to be one of the pioneer Arabists of Leiden University. He lived in France until 1593, most of the time in isolation in the Touraine. In 1593 he was appointed professor of Latin, Roman Classics and History at the University of Leiden. Scaliger's international renown as scholar was meant to attract students and scholars to Leiden University. Scaliger also brought with him to Leiden a substantial part of his library, which included many rare Oriental books. He had assembled such a fine private library because he required many source texts for his study of chronology. Scaliger's arrival in Leiden and his accompanying collection of *Orientalia* would provide an important contribution to the development of the University of Leiden. Scaliger's appointment also marked the beginning of the rise of the Dutch Republic as a centre of scholarship and printing in the seventeenth century.

Scaliger never went back to France. Neither was he a frequent traveller and he never visited the Near or Middle East. In a certain way of speaking he was living in Leiden in isolation, too. The Low Countries were still at war with Spain and the war was never far away from Leiden and Holland. This situation poses an important question: how did Scal-

iger manage to collect a considerable and important collection of Oriental books and manuscripts while living under these circumstances?

MASTERING ARABIC

It is undeniable that, at the end of his life, Scaliger was regarded as one of the foremost philologists of his time. How Scaliger gained this expertise and learned so many languages, especially the Oriental tongues, remains somewhat of a mystery. In the *Scaligerana* (ed. 1740) or "Scaliger's Table Talks," the scholar relates how he first learned Arabic from his father, although this seems unlikely. It is however certain that he first encountered these languages during his time at the University of Paris. He matriculated at the university in 1559, and from this moment onwards his life became ever more shaped by books. An enthusiastic autodidact, Scaliger taught himself Greek and Hebrew. To enhance his knowledge of Hebrew, Scaliger asked the help of the Orientalist Guillaume Postel (1510–1581), around this time the only true authority in France in the field of Oriental languages and a pioneer of Arabic philology in the western world. Postel's *Grammatica Arabica*, (c. 1540), was his most important contribution to the study of Oriental languages, thanks to the depiction of the Arabic alphabet and the translation of the *Lord's Prayer* into Arabic. Postel was furthermore also one of the first western scholars to devote serious attention to the study of Samaritan and Syriac. We can say with certainty that Scaliger's first tentative engagement with Arabic and Syriac was made with Postel's help. He also influenced Scaliger in his love of collecting Oriental and especially Arabic manuscripts.

The growing interest in Arabic that emerged in France around 1600, was a result of more frequent contacts between French ambassadors and diplomats and the court of the Sultan in Istanbul. This interest explains why there were several professors who taught Arabic at the Collège Royal, alongside their official disciplines of mathematics or medicine, two fields that were heavily indebted to Arabic texts. Close study of the Old Testament also

convinced some scholars that knowledge of Arabic might help solve some of the philological uncertainties in the original Hebrew text. Arabic was also studied for missionary purposes.

During his study in Paris, Scaliger acquired a large part of his book collection from local bookshops. The stock available here came from all over Europe and consisted mostly of reference and study books and theological publications by Christian Hebraists, but also books printed in Oriental languages. Oriental manuscripts were naturally perceived as unique objects, but printed books in Oriental languages were also seen as desirable rarities, given that they were often produced in small print runs. Most books were printed and traded in the Italian city states, especially in Venice, home to a large Jewish community. It was not easy to acquire Oriental books.

When, in 1573, Scaliger commenced his research on classical sources for his edition of the astronomical poem of Manilius, his attention was also drawn to texts in Oriental languages. In 1576 Scaliger finished his edition of Catullus, Tibullus and Propertius, and cast his eye more firmly on the Orient. In a project of 1577, composing a psalter in six languages, Arabic played a prominent role. This psalter would be accompanied by his annotations and a philological commentary, but also by a brief note on how one could learn these languages. He also meant to refer the reader to several titles, partly in Arabic, that he owned himself. Unfortunately, this project never saw the light of day. By the middle of the 1570s, Scaliger had an elementary grasp of Arabic. A large number of Arabic books, including at least one manuscript of the Qur'an, had come into Scaliger's possession at least by the late 1570s. To understand the Qur'an more thoroughly, Scaliger wished to lay his hands on an Italian translation of the Qur'an, *L'Alcorano di Macometto*, [...] (Venice, Andrea Arrivabene, 1547), translated by Giovanni Battista Castrodardo (1517–1587/88). Scaliger was desperate to see a copy, because he presumed from the title-page description that the work had been translated directly from the Arabic. This made the



Portrait of Joseph Justus Scaliger working on an Arabic manuscript, by Jan Cornelisz van 't Woudt (1609). Senate Room, Leiden University. [UBL Icones 31]

► *Evangelium sanctum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi conscriptum a quatuor Evangelistis sanctis. Rome, In Typographia Medicea 1591. [UBL 878 A 5]*

book an invaluable point of departure to Scaliger for improving his own command of the language. But it turned out to be in vain, as the translation had not been made directly from Arabic, and was thus less useful for Scaliger's purposes. In general, Scaliger did not trust Latin transliterations of Arabic texts. After this futile search, Scaliger admitted that there were few reliable help-aids to improve his Arabic. He was obviously familiar with Postel's grammar, but claimed to be unaware of any others; it therefore became his ambition to compose one himself.

الفصل الثالث



فلما ولد يسوع في بيت لحم يهوذا في ايام هيروودس الملك
ان مجوس وافوا من المشرق الي ياروشليم قايلين اين هو
المولود ملك اليهود لانا راينا نجمة في المشرق ووافينا
لتسجد له فلما سمع هيروودس الملك اضطرب وجميع
ياروشليم معه وجمع كل رؤساء الكهنة وكتبة
الشعب واستخبرهم اين يولد المسيح فقالوا له في بيت
لحم يهوذا كما هو مكتوب في النبي وانت يا بيت لحم
ارض يهوذا الست بصغيرة في ملوك يهوذا الان منك يخرج
المدبر الذي يرعي شعبي اسراييل حينئذ دعا هيروودس
المجوس سرا وتحقق منهم الزمان الذي ظهر لهم فيه

الروح القدس ويوسف خطيبها لما كان صديقا ولم



يرد ان يشهرها وهم بتخليتها سرا وفيما هو مفكر في
 هذا ان ظهر له ملاك الرب في الحلم قايل يا يوسف ابن
 داود لا تخف ان تاخذ مريم خطيبتك فان الذي
 ولد فيها هو من الروح القدس وستلد ابنا وتدي
 اسمه يسوع لانه يخلص شعبه من خطاياهم وهذا كله
 كان لكي يتم ما قيل من الرب بالنبي القايل ها هوذا
 العذراء تحبل وتلد ابنا ويدي اسمه عمانوئيل الذي
 تفسيره الله معنا فقام يوسف من النوم وصنع كما امره
 ملاك الرب واخذ مريم خطيبته ولم يعرفها حتى
 ولدت ابنها البكر فدعا اسمه يسوع

BOOK HUNTING IN FRANCE

During the 1570s Scaliger was living in France under the patronage of Louis Chasteigner de la Roche-Posay, seigneur d'Abain (1535–1595). Scaliger was supported by him in several ways, one of them being the gift of books. In this period Scaliger's library expanded with a number of books that he could never have afforded himself: consider the four-volume Hebrew Bible (1546–1548), printed by Daniel Bomberg (1483–1553), that Chasteigner bought for him in 1578. While Scaliger continued to acquire Hebrew books, his interest in Arabic and other Oriental languages increased considerably during the 1580s. To acquire these books, Scaliger relied on his ever-expanding network of correspondents, notably his friends Pierre Pithou (1539–1596) and his brother François (1543–1621), Claude Dupuy (1545–1594) and Jacques-Auguste de Thou (1553–1617). These friends maintained close contacts with dealers and scholars in France and Italy.

Especially Dupuy, a great bibliophile himself, played a critical role in Scaliger's network and became one of his most important suppliers of books. Scaliger called Dupuy his "patron" and "protector." Scaliger once wrote to him that "I cannot find a man whom I can ask for rare books, except yourself." In March 1570, Dupuy travelled to Italy, where he befriended a large number of scholars and collectors in Venice, Bologna, Florence, Rome and Padua. In Padua he visited the collector, scholar and antiquarian Gian Vincenzo Pinelli (1535–1601). In 1580, Scaliger asked Dupuy to bring him into direct contact with Pinelli, so that Scaliger could ask him to search for several books that he required. Pinelli would be successful in locating some of the rare Oriental books and objects Scaliger was looking for such as a heart-shaped or "cordiform" Ottoman Turkish map of the world, printed in Venice in 1559/60. Scaliger was also keen to get his hands on new publications by the *Typographia Medicea*, a printing press for Oriental languages in Rome, for instance an Arabic New Testament and a Euclid, that were published from 1584 onwards.

Scaliger regularly required Dupuy's help in sourcing Oriental works; a process that, judging from Scal-

iger's correspondence, was often troublesome and frequently unsuccessful. But other attempts bore fruit, when Dupuy discovered a number of Arabic books and manuscripts in Rome, of which he could make copies for Scaliger. On some occasions Scaliger is more specific in his requests, for instance for a copy of a book of eight sheets in octavo, printed in Rome

Dialogue in Arabic between the physicians Sinân and Ahmad. *Musahabah ruhaniyah bayn al-'alimayn wa-ism wahid minhuma Shaykh Sinan wa-al-ism al-akhar Ahmad al-'Alim allati kanat fi ruju' ihima min al-Ka'bah nafi'ah li-kull muslim wa-muslima.* [Rome, 1579]. [UBL 877 G 1]



of a “spiritual dialogue between two physicians, one named Schaicun Sinan, the other named Achmad,” often also supplying the title written in Arabic.

Closer to home, Scaliger also relied on Dupuy’s contacts, who could lend him books, such as a copy of the Qur’an. Scaliger already possessed several copies of the Qur’an, but his collection did not include an exegesis of the text.

Scaliger not only depended on scholarly contacts for furnishing his library. Another contact who aided him was the merchant Pierre Hostagier in Marseille. Hostagier bought various Samaritan, Coptic and Arabic manuscripts for Scaliger in Cairo, the Middle East and in Marseille, a lively hub for the exchange of exotic goods. Scaliger valued his efforts greatly, and in a letter to Dupuy described Hostagier as “my dear and close friend.”

IN LEIDEN

When investigating Scaliger’s arrival at Leiden, it becomes clear that from the very beginning of the negotiations, there was abundant talk of books. Around the time of his move to Leiden, Scaliger had provided the printer Franciscus Raphelengius (1539–1597) with an impressive book list illustrating the variety of Oriental manuscripts and books in his collection. Raphelengius was deeply impressed and hoped for a fruitful collaboration between him and Scaliger.

At the end of the sixteenth century, the size of the university library of Leiden was modest, with only a small collection of manuscripts. Scaliger expected that he would find but few relevant sources for his research. In the section of Oriental works, the library was indeed badly equipped. Scaliger decided to select that particular portion of his library which was absolutely vital to his research, including many books and manuscripts printed or written in Oriental languages, and ship these to Leiden. Once in Leiden, he revelled in the opportunity to supplement his library with many more rare Eastern books. He relied on the local booksellers for this purpose, but he also remained dependent on his French network of scholars, diplomats, printers, agents and students. These correspondents all tapped into their own networks, cre-

ating the vast European book network that Scaliger profited from so greatly. His contemporaries were also aware of Scaliger’s skill and his ambition, because as time progressed, they would send him more and more Arabic manuscripts and other documents.

De Thou was one of his most important correspondents and suppliers of books while Scaliger was living in Leiden. His contact with Francesco I de’ Medici (1541–1587), Grand Duke of Tuscany, would later be of significant value to Scaliger for the purchase of Arabic books published by the *Typographia Medicea*. Until his death in 1595, Louis Chasteigner de la Roche-Posay, Scaliger’s patron, remained an important figure in Scaliger’s network. As ambassador in Rome, Chasteigner was constantly on the hunt for books for Scaliger. Often, this concerned Oriental books, such as the Arabic editions of Avicenna and Euclid, which he tried to acquire for Scaliger using the services of a certain Rucelay.

Henri Louis Chasteigner de la Roche-Posay, the son of Scaliger’s patron, took over from his father the role of supplier of books from Rome, the centre of Arabic printing around 1600. Whenever he was able to purchase Arabic books for Scaliger in Rome, he used the services of the network of the Leiden-based merchant Daniel van der Meulen (1554–1600), a close friend of Scaliger.

Since his reputation as an Oriental expert spread far and wide, Scaliger regularly received gifts from scholars or printers around Europe, often books or manuscripts in Arabic. In December 1599, Nicolas Vignier the Younger (c. 1575–1645) sent Scaliger an Arabic scroll from the library of his father. In early 1603, Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) sent him an Arabic manuscript with two hundred Arabic proverbs, as well as some coins and gemstones. The parcel also included a gift from the Parisian printer and bookseller

► Du ‘a’. Fragment of a paper scroll with prayer text in Arabic, sent as a gift to Scaliger by Nicolas Vignier the Younger. [UBL Or. 264]

Decorative header with a circular floral motif on the right, a central circular medallion containing the Basmala (Bismillah), and a large, pointed, teardrop-shaped medallion on the left. The text is written in elegant Thuluth calligraphic script.

Decorative header featuring a grid of small floral motifs on the right, a central circular medallion with the Basmala, and a large pointed medallion on the left. The text is written in Thuluth calligraphic script.

Decorative header with a repeating geometric pattern. Below it, a large rectangular frame contains a dense block of text in Thuluth script. The text is organized into columns and includes several lines of introductory text.

Decorative header with a repeating geometric pattern. Below it, a large rectangular frame contains a dense block of text in Thuluth script. The text is organized into columns and includes several lines of introductory text.

عصر عز الدين محمد قزويني وشمس المؤمنيين يا محمد

عصر عز الدين محمد قزويني وشمس المؤمنيين يا محمد

والله اعلم

عصر عز الدين محمد قزويني وشمس المؤمنيين يا محمد

عصر عز الدين محمد قزويني وشمس المؤمنيين يا محمد

عصر عز الدين محمد قزويني وشمس المؤمنيين يا محمد

عصر عز الدين محمد قزويني وشمس المؤمنيين يا محمد

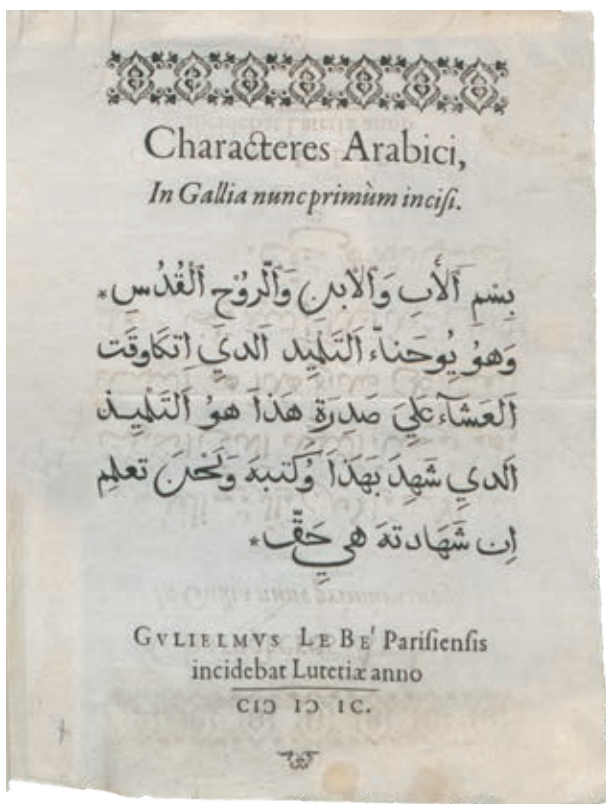
عصر عز الدين محمد قزويني وشمس المؤمنيين يا محمد

عصر عز الدين محمد قزويني وشمس المؤمنيين يا محمد

Guillaume II le Bé (c. 1560/70?–1645?), an edition of the Book of Psalms in Arabic. Le Bé shared a keen interest in Arabic with Scaliger. Le Bé had plans to print an Arabic grammar with his new typefaces, to be edited by Scaliger. To prove his worth as a scholarly printer, Le Bé sent to Scaliger a sample of his Arabic typefaces. For unknown reasons, the grammar would never appear, and Scaliger’s manuscript – if it ever existed – must be considered as lost.

From Germany, Arabic books and fragments also found their way to Scaliger. Conradus Rittershusius sent Scaliger a short manuscript, containing an Arabic liturgical text. A year later, Scaliger received some additional leaves with an Arabic text, sent to him by a young physician, Johann Conrad Rhumelius (1574–1630). These are all examples of

Guillaume Le Bé, *Characteres Arabici, in Gallia nunc primùm incisi*. Paris, 1599. © Courtesy of Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp.



documents, written or printed in exotic languages, that circulated in sixteenth-century Europe. Most scholars struggled to make sense of their contents, but they were all convinced that Scaliger would be able to decipher them.

Presumably around 1600, Scaliger made an inventory of a part of his book collection. The list contains various Arabic and Hebrew manuscripts that Scaliger owned at that moment. He ended the list with the statement: “These are the manuscripts in the library of Joseph Scaliger, as well as a large quantity of printed books which are both rare and written in a great variety of languages”. In 1608, Scaliger wrote another “Oriental catalogue”, essentially a list of sources used for his *De emendatione temporum*, published in 1583 and 1598. The dedication with which Scaliger studied Arabic stands out in his *Thesaurus Linguae arabicae*, a manuscript which he finished in 1597. For this thesaurus, Scaliger relied on information from his own collection of Arabic books and manuscripts. In 1608, he would provide an extensive overview of the Arabic sources that he consulted for this work in a letter to Étienne Hubert (1567–1614), a Parisian physician and Arabist in March 1608. At the end of his life, Scaliger once again composed a catalogue of Oriental books, added as a codicil to his will.

It is likely that news of Scaliger’s preparations for his bequest reverberated around the scholarly community, because in 1602, Jacques Esprinhard, a former student of Scaliger, asked if he would donate his Arabic manuscripts to the library of La Rochelle. Despite his ruminations about the future of his books, Scaliger was taken aback by this request. His answer was brusque: “It is as if someone asked another to give him his wife”. Yet although he rejected this proposal firmly, the prospect of bequeathing his collection did remain in Scaliger’s mind. When Scaliger, after sixteen years of his life as a Leiden professor, died on 21 January, 1609, he possessed a library of some 2,250 books. A portion of this, containing all his books in “foreign tongues,” he bequeathed to the university library.

CONCLUSION

Until 1593, Scaliger's intellectual world rotated around Paris. He sought out many contacts amongst old friends and scholars active in this city. During the second phase of his life, which played out in Leiden, Scaliger would devote himself to a broader European intellectual network. Yet he would never neglect his Parisian friends and correspondents. Some of his contacts would travel between Leiden and Paris. The fact that the Dutch Republic maintained good diplomatic relations with the French court during this time was also beneficial to Scaliger, because these formal political channels would provide secure lines of communication between the Netherlands and France. By supplying Scaliger with books, these correspondents allowed him to finish projects in the Dutch Republic that he had begun in France.

Scaliger's Oriental collection did not only consist of books that were bought or donated, but also books that were borrowed from his friends, in order to copy these out for himself. This was not an entirely selfish activity: Scaliger knew that the transcriptions made by him might later be of use to other scholars. This demonstrates that he did indeed reflect on the importance of donating his Oriental collection to the Leiden university library, which would turn the institution into one of the foremost centres for the study of the languages and cultures of the Middle East until the present day. It is partly for this reason that Scaliger continued, right up to the end of his life to add important texts to his collection, in order to pass on a corpus of works as complete as possible to a future generation of scholars.

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► The oldest printed book in Arabic: *Kitab salat al-sawa'i*, a *Horologion* for the Melkite Christians in Syria. Fano [i.e., Venice?]: Gregorio de Gregorii, 1514. [UBL 876 G 27]

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَحَسَنٌ تَوْفِيقُهُ نَكْتَبُ

لصَلواتِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ بِهِ

أَوَّلُ ذَلِكَ صَلَاةُ نِصْفِ اللَّيْلِ

تَقُولُ بِصَلَوَاتِ جَمِيعِ أَبْهَاءِ

نَسَائِلِ الْقُرَيْشِيِّينَ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ

الْمَسِيحِ الْإِسْحَاقَ بْنَ مَرْيَمَ ابْنَةَ

LIGERI.